



The Media as Technical Competitor for Crisis and Combat Information

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Mass Media Organizations Today

- Mass media's global influence has increased with their expansion in international markets
- The rise in “real time” and “rolling” TV news has transformed industry operations and audience expectations
- Technological advances have increased mass media capabilities to disseminate information rapidly



Mass Media Organizations Today

- New information technology is freeing the media from their traditional reliance on official institutional sources of news
- Rather than conveyors of official descriptions of events, news media are beginning to look more like primary source intelligence organizations
- This is particularly true during crises and conflicts
- Bottom Line: The media will affect military operations in the era of info-centric warfare



Tension between the Military and Media

- Sociological Sources of Tension
 - Journalists and the military inhabit distinct cultures
- Institutional Sources of Tension
 - Secrecy versus “the scoop”
- Fewer tensions between regular defense beat correspondents and the military
- BUT: during times of war and crisis, non-beat reporters are assigned to cover “the war”



Asymmetrical Transparency

- For warfighters, the purpose of advanced IT is to create dominant battlefield awareness -- and put one's potential adversary at a disadvantage
- “The joint force must be able to take advantage of superior information converted to superior knowledge to achieve ‘decision superiority’”
 - Joint Vision 2020



Security in an Age of Transparency

- Few opponents can fund and deploy their own “system of systems” to challenge US information dominance
- Though not an “opponent,” media organizations and their sources can
- A qualitative advance in civilian IT has occurred in the last five years
- As a result, the ability to maintain a secure information environment during conflict has eroded significantly



War Coverage in the Persian Gulf War

- “Mobile” uplinks required a flatbed truck and came with a crew of five
 - ex: Peter Arnett interview of Saddam, Jan. 28, 1991
- Radio and TV could report live -- but only from Riyadh and Dhahran, close to tons of satellite uplink equipment
- INMARSAT satellite phones were engineered for hotel balconies, not front lines
 - main problem: power supply



War Coverage in the Persian Gulf War

- Journalists took their stories to Allied Forward Transmission Units (FTUs), which had satellite links to Washington and London
- Military dispatchers delayed physical transportation of stories to the FTUs and reviewed stories (especially pool reports) before releasing them for transmission
- “You turn over control of your copy to them (the military dispatchers) and they don’t care whether it gets there (to the FTUs) or not.”

– Edward Cody, *The Washington Post*



Today: Satellite Uplinks

- KU Band “Flyaways” are now capable of fitting in two flight cases, weigh 100 lbs.
- “Ideally suited for emergency telephone restoration, disaster relief and corporate communications, in addition to its more traditional role as a television newsgathering, or outside broadcasting system.”

– Advent Communications





Today: Satellite Telephones

- Live video feed requires at least 4 Mbps.
- Inmarsat Mini-M has bit-rate of 56/64 kbps -- creates picture artifacts unacceptable for most professional standards for “live” use.
 - Ex: CNN sent brief live image of NATO missile attack in Serbia (1999)
- But “store and forward” is already very common
 - encode the video and audio input
 - compress it
 - store on hard drive
 - transmit data over the Inmarsat phone



Flying News Organizations: Aerobureau

- Self-sustaining, flying newsroom
 - Lockheed L-188C Electra turbo-prop aircraft
 - can fly 4,250 miles non-stop at 460 mph
 - can land on short, conventional runways or unprepared surfaces
 - can orbit over inaccessible terrain for 20 hours
 - on-board fuel supply can provide 2 weeks of full power operation on the ground without refueling
- News Gathering Equipment
 - Multiple video, audio and data communications
 - Gyro-stabilized cameras
 - SLAR/FLIR
 - 2 camera-equipped remotely piloted vehicles



Televised War Coverage in Afghanistan

- Videophones stream video over Inmarsat Global Area Network (GAN) satellite terminals
 - Video recorded on digital video cameras
 - TH2 “Talking Head” lunch-box sized videophones weigh 9 lbs, draw power from car batteries
 - GAN terminals are aircraft carry-on luggage
- Many broadcasters use 2 GAN terminals together -- for a 128 kbps ISDN connection and better picture quality
- GAN is ‘on-demand’ service, covering 98 percent of landmasses



Print War Coverage in Afghanistan

- NYT had 11 reporters on ground in Afghanistan -- only one with the US military
- Equipped with Thuraya cell phones
 - A basic unit costs \$730
 - Service ‘on demand’ for approx. \$2 per minute
 - GSM and satellite coverage
 - charges through car battery
 - Used with digital camera for photos
 - transmits data at 9.6 kbps when hooked to computer -- email and Internet service
- Foreign print journalists, freelancers have similar systems



Information Dominance?

- The military's goal of seeking information dominance on the future battlefield is profoundly unrealistic
- Buying up satellite coverage or “soft killing” communications links is a short-sighted, losing proposition
 - Technology will only get cheaper and more ubiquitous
 - These actions will recreate the media's passion for “never again” being beholden to military censorship
 - There will always be a business imperative to get the scoop



Information Dominance?

- Instead, the military needs to prepare to operate in an environment of information parity or transparency
- This requires treating the media as partners in information operations on the battlefield
 - The Office of Strategic Influence does not help!
- Big media organizations are repeat players
 - They employ professionals
 - They will work with the government, if they believe the government is working with them
- Freelancers and foreign media may have different goals
 - But the 24-hour news hole will require that they recycle information from the US media, too